DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 221 TM 032 449

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TITLE	Estimating the Impact of the New Promotion/Intervention Policy. Eye on Evaluation. E&R Report.
INSTITUTION	Wake County Public School System, Raleigh, NC. Dept. of Evaluation and Research.
REPORT NO	RR-01.11
PUB DATE	2000-11-00
NOTE	8p.
PUB TYPE	Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Policy; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; *Grade Repetition; *Intervention; *Low Achievement; Mathematics; Reading; Summer Programs
IDENTIFIERS	North Carolina End of Grade Testing Program; *Wake County Public School System NC

ABSTRACT

At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, 9,175 students in grades 3-8 in the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), North Carolina, failed to score at or above grade level on either reading or mathematics, or both sections of the North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) tests. Under the new WCPSS promotion/intervention policy in effect for the 2000-2001 school year, such students are candidates for intervention and are at risk for being retained in the same grade level. This paper describes a pilot test of the new promotion/intervention policy and describes what happened to students who failed their EOG tests. The study took place in seven elementary and middle schools. At the pilot sites, school staff provided up to two retesting opportunities for students, with a brief period of remediation before the first retest. Students at pilot schools with traditional calendars could take a second retest at the end of summer school. In grades 3 through 5 in the pilot schools, 269 students did not pass the EOG tests. After the 2 opportunities for retesting and the summer program, 78.1% were promoted, 17.1% were retained, and 4.8% were no longer enrolled. At the middle school level, of the 500 students who did not pass the EOG tests, 67.8% were promoted, 20.2% were retained, and 12.0% were no longer enrolled. These results show that, at the elementary level, only a little help is sometimes needed, since most students who improved did so before the summer program. The effectiveness of summer school was limited in helping students meet the new standard. The analyses indicate that a conservative estimate is that retention for 2000-2001 may double at elementary and middle schools, although anecdotal evidence from other counties suggests that this retention rate would soon begin to decrease. (SLD)

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ED 451 221

Eye on Evaluation

Evaluation and Research Department

November 2000 E&R Report No. 01.11

Estimating the Impact of the New Promotion/Intervention Policy

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TM032449

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WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Eye on Evaluation

Evaluation and Research Department

E&R Report No. 01.11 November 2000

Estimating the Impact of the New Promotion/Intervention Policy

Author: Karen E. Banks, Ph.D.

At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, 9,175 WCPSS students in grades 3-8 "failed" to score at or above grade level on either the reading, mathematics, or both sections of the End of Grade (EOG) tests; i.e., they scored at Level I or II out of the four levels. Under the new WCPSS promotion/intervention policy in effect for the 2000-2001 school year, such students are candidates for intervention, and are at risk for being retained in the same grade level. This briefing paper describes a pilot of the new promotion/intervention policy and describes what happened to students who "failed" their EOG tests.

Seven schools volunteered for the pilot: Combs, Lacy, Lockhart, North Ridge and Wilburn Elementary Schools, and North Garner and Wake Forest-Rolesville Middle Schools. (Fuquay-Varina Middle School also participated at 8th grade only.)

At the pilot sites, school staff provided up to two retesting opportunities for students who did not score at or above grade level on the regular End-of-Grade tests administered three weeks before the end of school. These students were offered a brief period of remediation prior to the first retest. The first retesting opportunity came during the last week of school. Those students who either refused the first retest or who failed to pass it were then offered a summer school opportunity, except at Wilburn (due to the year-round, multitrack calendar.)

Finally, students at traditional calendar pilot schools could take a second retest at the end of summer school. Thus, students had three testing opportunities: 1) the original EOG test during the last three weeks of school, 2) the first retest during the last week of school, and 3) the second retest following summer school. Students failing the second retest could appeal the retention that would normally follow.

What was the final outcome for Level I and II students?

In grades 3-5 at the pilot schools, 269 students scored at Level I or II (below grade level) on the regular administration of EOG tests. Of these 269 students, after two opportunities for retesting and a summer intervention program, 78.1% were promoted, 17.1% were retained, and 4.8% are no longer enrolled.

At the middle school pilots, 590 students scored at Level I or II on the EOG tests. Of these students, after two opportunities for retesting and a summer intervention program, 67.8% were promoted, 20.2% were retained, and 12.0% are no longer enrolled.

Figures 1 and 2 show that 17.1 % of elementary school Level I and II students and 20.2 % of middle school Level I and II students at pilot schools were retained. Considering that all of the Level I and II students were originally at risk for retention under the new policy, the actual percentage of the students retained was considerably lower.

Figure 1: Final Status for Level I & II Students at Pilot Elementary Schools
N=269

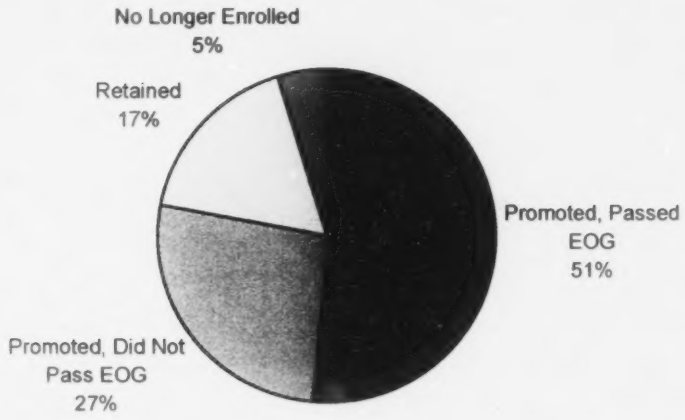
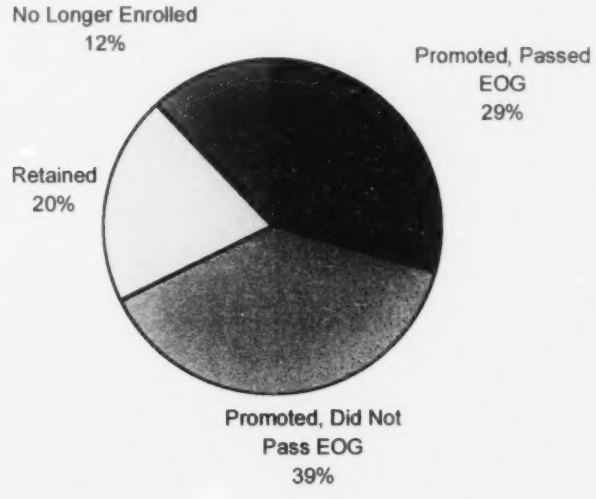


Figure 2: Final Status for Level I & II Students at Pilot Middle Schools
N=590

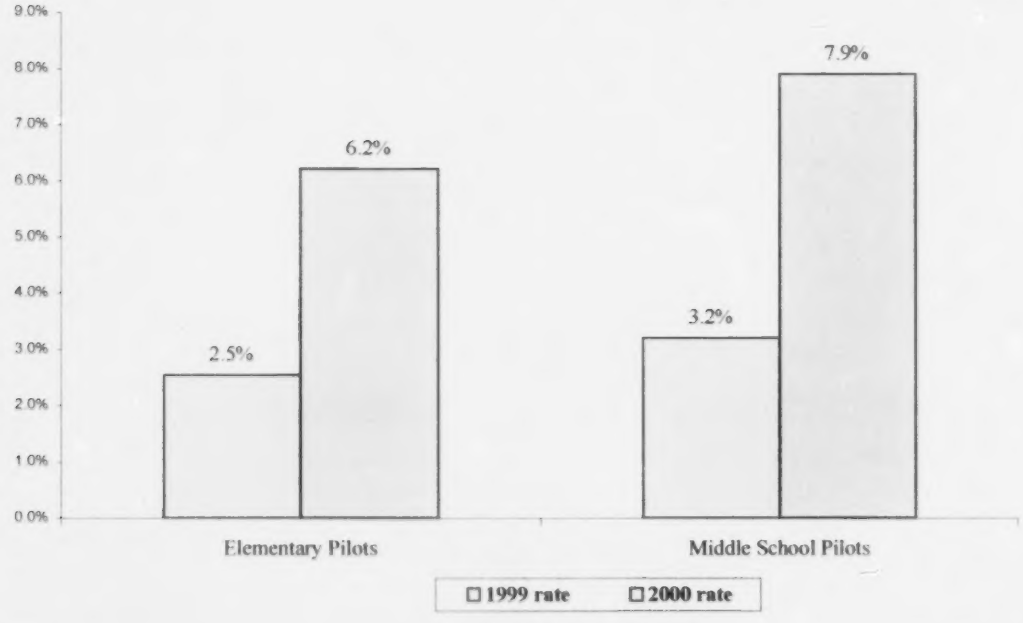


How did the overall retention rate at the pilot schools change?

Students can be retained for many reasons, including low achievement. Using the retention reports that each WCPSS school submitted to the state, we compared rates before and after the new policy at the seven pilot schools. The 1998-99 retention rate for the five elementary schools in the pilots was 2.54%. The 1999-2000 retention rate for these same schools was 6.21%. These rates include all students, grades K-5.

At the middle school level, 1998-99 retention rate for the two pilot schools was 3.2%, versus 7.9% for 1999-2000. These rates are based on grades 6-8, and do not include Fuquay-Varina's 8th grade students.

Figure 3. Retention Rates Before and After Implementing the New Policy



How will these results generalize to WCPSS overall?

For 1998-99, the WCPSS retention rate for elementary schools was 2.23%; the rate was 2.99% for middle schools. Rates for 1999-2000 were slightly higher, probably due to the increased rates at the seven pilot schools: 2.92% and 3.46% for elementary and middle schools, respectively.

The schools in the pilot project may not be typical of WCPSS schools in general. The pilot schools generally had higher percentages of students receiving free- or reduced-price lunches than the district as a whole. The case might be made, however, that the unit of analysis in this case is the individual student, and that a Level I student at a school in the pilot project was

probably similar to a Level I student elsewhere in the district. In that case, the retention rates projected for 2000-2001 would be about two and a half times higher than the previous rates.

On the other hand, one could argue that Level I and II students at other schools would be predicted to perform slightly better due to the whole-school socioeconomic factors previously mentioned. If so, it follows that the increase from 2.5% to 6.2% at the elementary level, and from 3.2% to 7.9% for middle schools, would lead to an overestimate of the rate increases that would be found across all schools in WCPSS.

In any case, a *conservative* estimate would be that retention rates for 2000-01 may double at elementary and middle schools. Anecdotal evidence from other counties suggests that the retention rate would decrease again in 2001-02 and subsequent years, as students, teachers, and parents adjust to the new standards.

What was the impact of the retest, summer school, and appeals processes?

Figure 4 shows the students who succeeded by passing the first and second retest. There were major differences in the percentage of elementary and middle school Level I and II students "passing" the EOG on the first retest. At the elementary school level, about 40.1% of the original Level I and II population "passed" the first retest. This suggests that these younger students sometimes need only a little help or a second chance to demonstrate grade level performance.

By contrast, about 22.0% of Level I and II middle school students passed on the first retest. Test results are apparently more stable for these older students, suggesting that true skill deficits probably cannot be addressed as quickly for older students.

After summer school, an additional 11.2% of elementary and 15.3% of middle school Level I and II students passed the test. Thus, after both retests and summer intervention, a total of 51.3% elementary and 37.3% of middle school Level I and II students had passed the EOG test.[1]

It is significant that only 11-15% of Level I and II students became eligible for promotion based on the second retest. This confirms earlier practices of the WCPSS which focused primarily on intervention during the school year. While summer school may be an additional option under the new policy, the effectiveness of summer school is clearly limited in helping students meet the new standards.

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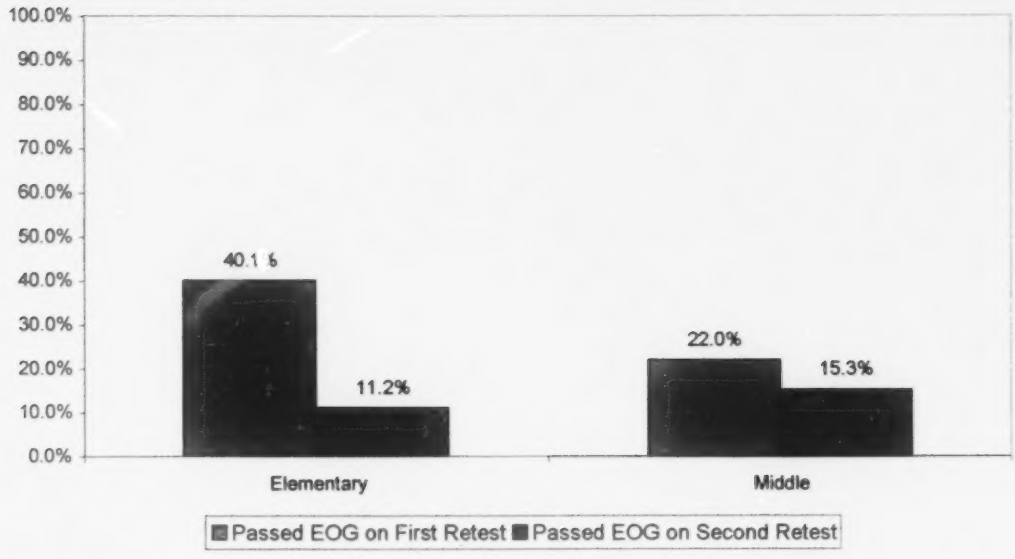
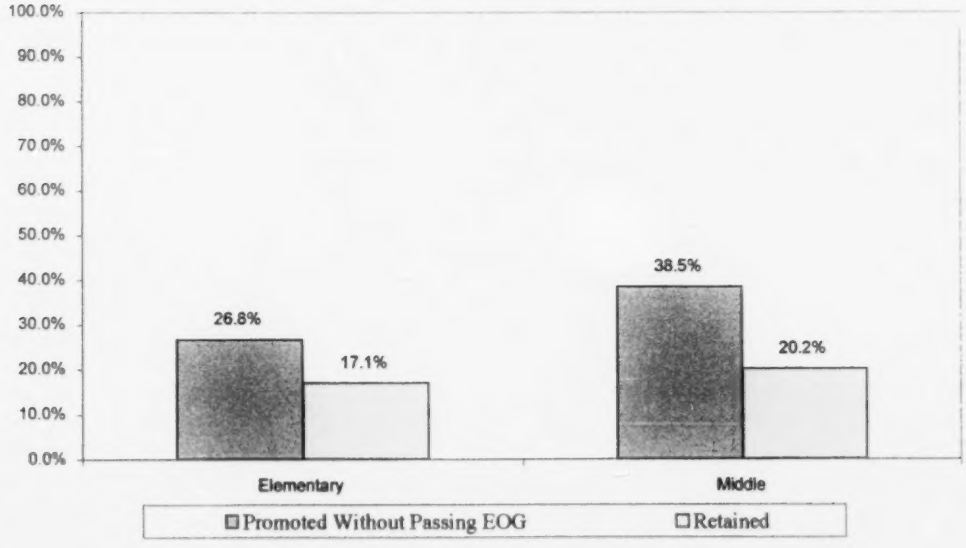
[1] Totals for middle school students in Figure 2 reflect actual outcomes at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year and sum to less than 37.3%, because about 8.0% of these Level I and II students apparently left the district after passing the test. Since the primary purpose of these analyses was to assist the Office of Student Assignment in projecting enrollment at elementary and middle schools, Figure 2 reflects what ultimately happened to students, while Figure 3 focuses on test performance.

Figure 4: Percentage of Level I and II Students Passing Retests



The appeals process and other grade placement decisions at the school level resulted in promotion rather than retention for 26.8 and 38.5% respectively of the elementary and middle students in the original group of Level I and II students. Figure 5 shows the difference in eventual outcomes for the two grade levels. Also apparent is that the percentage of Level I and II students promoted without passing the EOG may be as great as a fourth to a third of these students. Further discussion of this issue follows in the next section.

Figure 5: Outcomes for Level I and II Students Who Did Not Pass EOG



Implications

It is reasonable to expect an increase, possibly as much as doubling, in the percentage of students retained at the end of 2000-2001. Schools should not expect a large percentage of Level I and II students to "pass" EOG tests after summer school. Finally, the appeals process will likely be a fairly extensive effort across the WCPSS, if the percentage of pilot school Level I and II students eventually promoted is an accurate indicator.

Appeals committees make their recommendations to the school principal, who makes the final decision. Future analyses should examine in detail those students who were promoted without "passing" EOG's. Were some of these students previously retained? What percentage were special education students whose IEP would govern grade level placements? Clearly, either through the appeals process or through decisions by individual principals, a large percentage of students were promoted. Understanding the factors affecting decisions about these students could be important in understanding the implications of the promotion/intervention policy.

Another issue for further consideration is the high percentage of Level I and II students at the pilot schools who were no longer enrolled by fall 2000. We know that such students are generally more mobile but do not know whether the new policy had any impact on their rate of mobility.